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**Reflections on
the Growing Together
of the German Armed Forces**

Brigadier General Hans-Peter von Kirchbach

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With an Introduction by
Colonel Robert R. Ulin
Department of National Security and Strategy
U.S. Army War College

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**REFLECTIONS ON
THE GROWING TOGETHER
OF THE GERMAN ARMED FORCES:
THE EGGESIN GARRISON AS
AN EXAMPLE FOR THE UNIFICATION
OF TWO ARMIES**

Brigadier General Hans-Peter von Kirchbach



February 14, 1992

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FOREWORD

The reconciliation of peoples after a long period of conflict is a painful process. Indeed, our experience in the aftermath of the American Civil War was particularly painful for Americans on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line.

The cold war ended in Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. This event started an irreversible process of disintegration for the Warsaw Pact which eventually ended in the demise of the Soviet Empire. As the Pact crumbled, the process of rebuilding the economies, political institutions and militaries of its former members began.

On October 3, 1990, the two Germanies became one state and the process of political, economic and military unification was begun in earnest. The media have given extensive coverage to the economic difficulties associated with decentralization and the political problems concerning the building of democratic organs, but we have seen little on the process of military unification in the new eastern *Laender*.

Brigadier General Hans-Peter von Kirchbach, a 1989 graduate of the U.S. Army War College, assumed command of a former East German division on October 3, 1990. His unit was redesignated the Home Defense Brigade 41. The leadership challenges he faced during this extraordinary period of transition are noteworthy as they provide unique insights about a former adversary and highlight the fundamental differences which separated the West from the East during the forty years of the cold war.

During a brief visit to the War College in October 1991, General von Kirchbach extended an invitation to Colonel Robert R. Ulin of the Department of National Security and Strategy to witness, first-hand, history in the making. Colonel Ulin traveled to Germany in November 1991 and returned with a manuscript which details some of General von Kirchbach's experiences and is provided here in its entirety. Colonel Ulin notes his own observations in the introduction to this compelling story.



KARL W. ROBINSON
Colonel, U.S. Army
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

INTRODUCTION

In November 1991, I had the opportunity to visit Brigadier General Hans-Peter von Kirchbach at his headquarters in Eggesin, Germany. I was unaware when I planned the trip that I would be the first official American to visit his unit in a remote part of the far northeast corner of Germany.

It was only at the last moment, the evening before I was to board a flight to Berlin, that I received permission from Bonn to make the trip. Sensitivities still linger from the Soviet-German agreement restricting NATO forces from entering the former GDR territory. Fortunately for me, my mission was academic. As an Army War College faculty member and in my capacity as the Director of International and European Studies, I wanted to see first-hand the condition of the liberated German countryside, the infrastructure and the people and to gain a better appreciation for the process of transforming the *National Volksarmee (NVA)* to the defensively oriented *Bundeswehr*.

I was required to travel in mufti so as to maintain a low profile. I rented a car at Tegel airport in Berlin and was surprised to discover that my rental contract forbade me from taking the car to Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, USSR and Yugoslavia. I was told candidly that there were serious problems finding lead-free fuel and that many cars were being stolen. This dashed my hopes of driving into Poland and seeing the former German territories of Silesia and Pomerania.

I headed north towards the Berlin Beltway and passed through the former checkpoint separating West Berlin from the former GDR and I must say that I felt some trepidation realizing that I had just entered former enemy territory. Once I had left the beltway heading north along highway 109, I immediately noticed the drab, worn and dilapidated state of the countryside. Much of the road was cobblestone and in serious need of repair. From the road bed to the front of the line of houses in the numerous small villages I passed through, there were mud and pools of standing water which resulted from a previous rain. There were no sidewalks. Decay of the infrastructure was evident everywhere. Farm

implements were rusty, wood was rotting, chunks of plaster were missing from walls exposing the brick beneath. For me it was *deja vu*. I recall rural Germany in 1960 when I served in Nuremberg. At that time, the West was still recovering from the ravages of war. What I was seeing in this newly liberated part of Germany reminded me of an earlier period. It was as if this part of Germany had been frozen in time.

Western influence was evident here and there. Many sections of the road had been capped with fresh asphalt. It was a great pleasure to have such stretches under my wheels as the bone jarring cobblestones were noisy and bothersome. In nearly every little village I noticed new television antenna dishes installed on houses. All were oriented towards Berlin. I found out later that much of this northeastern part of Germany had not received Western television. The only source of "news" was GDR controlled. It was obvious that the new government placed a high priority on extending Western influence via television.

Other signs of Western influence were the numerous used car lots which had sprung up in farmers' yards and adjacent fields. I was told later that one used car dealer in Bonn had sold his entire stock of cars in one day. They were destined for the car-starved East. Additionally, nearly every village of any consequence had at least one brightly painted store which was well stocked and stood out in stark contrast to the dirty brown structures which surrounded it.

The factories I passed reflected the general state of decay and did not at all reflect the German penchant for tidiness and cleanliness I had grown accustomed to in the West. Driving through the forests I was struck by the presence of abandoned vehicles and other bits of trash which no doubt make the ecology-minded Westerners shudder.

Still, I saw signs of progress everywhere; primarily road repair but some new construction and fresh paint. As I was seeing only a small but remote section of the East, I was struck by the enormous undertaking of the German government to bring this part of Germany up to the high standards one finds in the West. Clearly, the improvements are pervasive and are transforming the countryside. But much remains to be done.

Upon my arrival in Eggesin, I followed the sign to *Heimatshutzbrigade* (Home Defense Brigade) 41 which is located on the outskirts of this small village. I was greeted by a civilian gate guard. I told him I was there to see General von Kirchbach and he politely allowed me to enter. Later I was told that the gate guard was a former *NVA* Lieutenant Colonel who had elected to leave the service but was quite pleased to have a job.

As General von Kirchbach showed me around his unit I saw him interact with his officers and men and I was impressed with the ease with which he chatted with them in a relaxed and friendly manner. He was obviously at home with his enormously important task of transforming an offensively oriented *NVA* Tank division into a defensively oriented *Bundeswehr* brigade.

We are particularly proud that General von Kirchbach is a 1989 graduate of the U.S. Army War College. He proudly displays his diploma on the wall of his office, and in his trophy case is the U.S. Army War College Foundation Writing Award he received for his outstanding Military Study Project.

The story that follows needs little explanation. It is an interesting and compelling tale about the challenges of leadership under difficult circumstances. It provides unique insights on the readiness and posture of our former adversaries and it highlights the immense difference in the military priorities between a democracy and a totalitarian state. His story, in his own style, follows.

ROBERT R. ULIN
Colonel, Field Artillery
U.S. Army War College

REFLECTIONS ON THE GROWING TOGETHER OF THE GERMAN ARMED FORCES: THE EGGESIN GARRISON AS AN EXAMPLE FOR THE UNIFICATION OF TWO ARMIES

Preface.

When roughly one year ago (1990) officers and NCOs from the Federal Republic of Germany set out for the eastern parts of Germany which had been reunited with the western parts – to implement the reunification of the armed forces—they did not know much about the general conditions they would find. This was also true for my group of some 70 officers and 30 NCOs who were sent to Eggesin, a town in Western Pomerania. Neither did we know anything about the tremendous organizational work we would be faced with nor about the perhaps even greater and more difficult task relating to the human aspects of our mission. Although both areas – organization and human aspects – are somewhat related, they do present different challenges. This is why I would like to split my presentation into one section on the technical and organizational procedures and another section dealing with the human and psychological aspects. In conclusion, at the end of my presentation, I will – in an overview – try to bring both sections together again.

Organizational Aspects.

Eggesin used to be a place in the former German Democratic Republic that was extraordinarily well known. The town was a pseudonym for the Army in general and it had a rather bad reputation. There was no other place within the former GDR that showed such a high concentration of troops. And – although the town is situated in wonderful scenery – it

is also situated – as the Americans would say – "right in the middle of nowhere."

Between 10,000 and 14,000 military personnel were stationed in the County of Uckermunde – the county that Eggesin is located in. Most of the military in this area served with the 9th Armored Division of the former East German Army (EGA), with a partially cadred Motorized Rifle Division performing the tasks of an NCO school. Additionally, there were a few Air Force formations.

The divisions were stationed in five very large garrisons built around the Jagerbruck Major Training Area. The largest distance between the garrisons is about 20 km (12 miles). This explains why even the remarkably high readiness and alert posture of the EGA was exceeded in this area. Only one hour after an alert was called, the bulk of 9th Armored Division was able to report "ready for movement." The division received the honorary designation "Heinz Hoffmann" because its mission accomplishment was so consistently outstanding. Heinz Hoffman was a former *Defense Secretary* of the GDR.

Personnel.

When we arrived at Eggesin, the 9th Armored Division was still a well organized major Army formation. The divisional headquarters was operational at least as far as command and control of formations and units were concerned. However, there were considerable personnel problems. Hundreds of military conscripts and young NCOs had left (deserted) the division. Those who were still there displayed a high level of indiscipline that could barely be handled by the leaders who were no longer respected. I will talk about this later. For us it was important to prevent a further drain of personnel to ensure mission accomplishment and we were successful in doing so; our slogan – "gain confidence, maintain dialogue and improve discipline" – supported our efforts. Very soon it was accepted not only by those officers and NCOs sent in from the West but also by many of the former EGA members.

On October 3, 1990, the 9th Armored Division had 683 officers (including 112 field grade officers), 895 NCOs and

1,745 enlisted. By the end of 1990, 257 officers and 277 NCOs had left the division at their own request. Most of the remaining officers and NCOs applied to be accepted as temporary career soldiers for two years. The division's objective was to offer a fair chance to all applicants. At that time it was hardly possible to comment reasonably on the eligibility and performance of the applicants. Consequently, most of the applications were supported. Eventually some 73 percent of the officers and 95 percent of the NCOs were accepted. Adding to these were officers and NCOs from the other garrison formations. The acceptance of these personnel was, however, not based on actual requirements. This is the reason why today nearly all the officer positions are filled with two to five officers, even though a considerable number of them had been posted to other formations. As far as the NCOs are concerned only senior NCOs are available in sufficient number, and there is still a large requirement for junior NCOs. Therefore, young lieutenants are being employed as squad leaders. As for the next step in the personnel acceptance process (for longer-term temporary career soldiers or regulars), the Personnel Directorate and the Army Enlisted Personnel Office will base their decisions on actual requirements. This means that some 40 percent of the temporary career officers (two years) will not be accepted for an extension of their service.

Additionally, we would rather leave some positions vacant than have them filled with an unqualified officer/soldier. For the 41st Home Defense Brigade Western Pomerania – which was activated from the formations of 9th Armored Division on April 1, 1991 – this resulted in the following: a remarkable surplus of officers, a mostly adequate level of senior NCOs and a considerable lack of junior NCOs. Step by step we will be able to improve the situation by a recruitment campaign that has been underway now for some time and which is quite successful. In the field of military conscripts we have not yet experienced a shortfall, as the drafting rhythm of the former EGA was different from that of the West German *Bundeswehr*.

Military Security.

There is not very much I can say about personal security except that it is not proper for military leaders to complain about the past of former EGA officers and NCOs. Their past will be examined in the course of personnel security investigations by the German Military Counterintelligence Service or by a selection board. Our main task is to cooperate and to look ahead on the basis of mutual confidence.

We have not experienced any unsolvable problems in the field of physical security either. Admittedly, the burden of guard duty is too high. As our men have to provide guards for seven garrisons and seven ammunition storage sites, the rate of guard duties accounts for 14 percent. To draw a comparison: to the West, a maximum of 4 percent is accepted in a few cases. But we are trying to achieve a noticeable reduction of this burden by hiring civilian guard services and by abandoning certain ammunition sites.

Training.

It would certainly not be right to state that the training level of officers and NCOs from the former EGA was below that of the West German *Bundeswehr*. But it is a fact that the officers and NCOs were not trained to meet our requirements. This is a situation that needs to be corrected. In addition to the training we are conducting in our barracks, supplementary training in three phases (which takes place in the West) is scheduled for each officer and NCO. This program includes one training course related to the individual's rank at the Army Officers' School or the Army NCO Academy, one course related to the specific job assigned at the respective branch school and an on-the-job training period within the respective Western sponsor formation which – in our case – is the 3rd (GE) Armored Division. Each former EGA formation is teamed with a Western partnership unit. Frequent exchange visits occur between these units. This leads to officers and NCOs being away for up to 9 months; but this can easily be compensated for by positions being manned with several officers and NCOs respectively.

General Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training are currently conducted partially in the West and partially within our training units. For the time being, our training has not yet reached Western levels. However, thanks to the training support provided by the 3rd Armored Division and based on advanced experience of our trainers, this difference in quality will soon be overcome. In the field of advanced individual training we will have to live with limitations caused by the lack of authorized equipment for some time.

Logistics.

In all the garrisons we found completely dilapidated barracks buildings, but the technical areas and training facilities were in an excellent condition. Currently, we are renovating the billets, kitchens and heating plants at a total cost of some DM 50 million (\$31 million). Over the medium term, we will spend some DM 300 million (\$187.5 million) for the construction of new barracks. Since the orders for construction work are placed with local and regional companies, the *Bundeswehr* does represent a considerable economic stimulus in our region.

As the German Ministry of Defense (MOD) decided to take over only a few pieces of materiel and equipment of the former EGA, many *Bundeswehr* units in the East are facing the problem of their shelters, depots and hardstands being filled with outdated and obsolete equipment which is no longer required. Consequently, we are unable to receive new equipment according to the authorization documents. We had to develop an organization for out-processing old equipment which helped units to get rid of obsolete material. For this purpose so called "high-density storage areas" were set up in depots, at air bases and in garrisons that were no longer used. The EGA equipment was taken to these high-density storage areas and is currently being stored there waiting to be sold or to be destroyed in the case of weapon systems subject to the CFE agreement. So far, the 41st Home Defense Brigade has been able to "out-process" some 1,200 tons of ammunition (i.e., 50 percent), 420 tracked vehicles (i.e., 65 percent) and 750 wheeled vehicles (i.e., 20 percent).

We have received 12 Leopard 1A5 Main Battle Tanks (out of an authorized total of 106) and 6 105 mm Field Howitzers envisaged for training as part of our new authorized equipment.

Miscellaneous.

Thus far I have limited my discussion to the overall status of the Basic Functional Areas 1 thru 4. In the organizational area, there are, however, many more important problems. To mention just a few:

- environmental protection, dealing with residual pollution burdens;
- handover of terrain that is no longer required;
- establishing garrison training areas;
- occupational integration for military personnel leaving the armed forces;
- support for civilian employees;
- establishing a military district pay office; and many more.

We recognized the necessity for new approaches to solve these and other problems. To accomplish these tasks our superiors provided us with broad freedom of action. Clearly, only he who knows how to fully utilize this freedom can successfully contribute to the unification of the armed forces.

The Human and Psychological Aspect.

We had only little knowledge about the people within the former East German Army although there were many rumors:

- the East German Army as the Army of the party—the Socialist Unity Party (SED);
- the officers of the Army as SED party members;
- the activities of political officers with their own organization inside the armed forces;

- the activities of the Ministry for State Security (a secret police organization, the so-called STASI) reaching right into the armed forces;
- an army with a clear and obvious enemy image;
- we ourselves as part of this image;
- military operational capabilities during large-scale exercises occasionally shown on TV;
- the disciplined appearance on the occasion of parades and ceremonies; and,
- the high readiness posture.

We had heard about all this, and, of course, we were aware of the capabilities of the weapon systems and we had a rough idea of the structure and organization. But as far as the human dimension is concerned there was no communication between the soldiers serving in the two different armies.

First Impressions.

The first impressions were contradictory. Many soldiers were definitely feeling uncomfortable in their new uniforms which they were given on reunification day. My impression was that most of them were glad if nobody addressed them. I noticed some soldiers lowering their eyes so our eyes did not meet. As I was walking around the headquarters building I noticed that almost all the office doors were locked and some offices even had a doorbell. We quickly removed them. There was little communication beyond one's own area of responsibility. Eighteen different technical areas were working strictly separated from each other. I encountered situations with a surprising lack of discipline, and then I met many officers and some of the older NCOs who displayed an all too disciplined appearance resembling that of a puppet on a string.

"May I come in?"

"May I speak?"

"May I leave?"

These were expressions in the Army I had never known. Inside the East German Army they were obligatory; to us they sounded strange and overly-submissive. And I noticed an almost absurd system of secrecy: banalities and ordinary matters were treated like classified information.

When inspecting the headquarters company I had considerable problems coming into contact with the men. They obviously were not used to talking openly and freely with officers or NCOs. "A full colonel is talking to us!" said one of the privates, as he expressed his astonishment after he had become more confident.

Even in October 1990, everything required to establish readiness posture was still in excellent shape. The vehicles were properly maintained, many tanks were parked in heated sheds, the training equipment was in an exceptionally good condition. This was in contrast to what I found in many of the soldiers' billets and kitchens—most of which do not deserve this designation—damaged equipment and toilets and shower rooms in a miserable and pitiful state. And I saw an alerting system which was still tested just like an engine running idle until I ordered it stopped. This system allowed a central HQ and this meant Moscow—to call up the entire EGA and even reach the soldiers in the housing area. I was told that there had been a long-maintained requirement of an 85 percent personnel readiness posture which meant that the soldiers were separated from their families for weeks and months.

I was asked who would be entitled to use the dining room in the command HQ which so far had been reserved for the commander and his deputies. There was disbelief when I explained that the ordinary soldiers were to use the dining hall and they would be allowed to sit on chairs instead of a stool in the dining room.

Military Conscripts.

At first, the military conscripts were extremely reserved. However, their expectations concerning the *Bundeswehr* were high. And they made a clear distinction between the superiors East and the superiors West. At one command HQ with a guard

force of soldiers from the 9th Armored Division there were problems regarding accommodations, rations and leisure time which could not be solved by the local commander. The soldiers demanded to talk to a "superior West" because they had confidence in his understanding and his influence to change the situation. Whenever you meet these soldiers in a small circle in a private atmosphere it becomes easier to talk to them.

The soldiers from the headquarters company and from the signal battalion who had served within the EGA for 11 months and within the *Bundeswehr* for 1 month spoke about their experience. This was the first time I ever heard those who had been involved in the so-called "EK"* system talk about it in detail. This system was used by older conscripts to harass the younger ones; it was known to and accepted by superiors to a certain degree. I heard soldiers speaking about the harassment of the new recruits who were forced to clean the rooms with razor blades, to play games wearing the NBC protective clothes, to clean their small arms all night long and to do services for the older soldiers.

All the soldiers told me that in October 1989 they were called-up into a system which – at that time – was stable and still properly functioning. The events on the day the Berlin Wall fell were closely watched. At first the provisions for the readiness posture remained unchanged. After the opening of the Wall, the situation changed: it was almost impossible for the superiors to enforce discipline. Many of the strict provisions were lifted and relief was given: no more early morning physical training, generous regulation of leisure time, compensation for overtime. Most of the superiors learned this from the press or on the radio. At the same time, the military conscripts became aware of their new rights and took full advantage of their new liberties. Soldiers of the 9th Signal Battalion refused to participate in an exercise which demanded particular hardships. A similar problem occurred with the 9th Motorized Rifle Regiment prior to a field training exercise. Soldiers of Headquarters Company contacted the Minister for

* (The abbreviation "EK" stands for the German *Entlassungskandidat* and means "to be dismissed")

Disarmament and Defense and applied for a more generous exemption from duty.

Although the consumption of alcohol was strictly prohibited within the barracks, there were hundreds of ways to smuggle alcohol in. After the turn of events – that is the opening of the Wall – soldiers met at the carparks in front of the main gate. At these so-called "Trabbi parties" – named after the well-known GDR plastic car "Trabant/Trabbi" – soldiers drank alcohol until the prohibition was abolished only shortly afterwards. Only few superiors were able to master this situation which led to rapidly declining discipline within only 1 year. One soldier told me that he had been on guard duty some 30 or 40 times and that he had not been out for one of the ordered patrols.

So, following October 3, 1991 – day of the reunification – the impression the military conscripts made with the new *Bundeswehr* was not positive. Although everybody acknowledged that the tone had changed and that the new *superiors* were striving to improve living conditions (billets, sanitary installations, kitchens, dining facilities) there was the negative aspect of additional duties. Also the burden produced by guard duties increased rapidly after the high voltage protection systems of the ammunition storage sites were switched off. At the same time the desire for higher living standards increased; people wanted Western standards – at once. For example: one commander was asked whether it was correct that all the squad rooms in the West were equipped with a microwave and when the latter would be introduced in the East. It was not easy to build up a reasonable relationship with these young people by acting in a calm and matter-of-fact manner and by taking appropriate measures. Personal problems placed an additional burden on the situation. Many of the young soldiers are married (marriage was the only chance to get an apartment), but the official system of financial support and maintenance for the conscripts and their dependents was not yet operational. We had to explain to the administration how the system worked. And we had to encourage the soldiers to submit their claims.

In several cases we found that the Job Reservation Act had been disregarded. (Under this act the job of a military conscript is to be reserved for as long as he serves in the armed forces.) The conscripts became more confident when we were able – in individual cases – to make the employers withdraw the dismissal of their former employees who had served in the armed forces as conscripts. Over the months, the inner structure of the units improved.

I made it a point to maintain a dialogue with the conscripts and I have noticed that the atmosphere is slowly changing. Openness is growing, willingness to do a good job is increasing, soldiers are learning how to express justified criticism in the proper way without reservation; but they also notice and accept the improvements that have been achieved.

Some soldiers (although their number should be larger) become interested in their civilian career. They take part in courses offered to promote supplementary training and retraining for a civilian profession. They meet Western comrades of the same age, they go to Western garrisons and a considerable number of them are given the opportunity to travel to Berlin or Bonn.

During a meeting of company commanders, one point on the agenda was the discussion of commanders with their conscripts concerning additional required improvements. A company commander from the former EGA asked a recruit whether he made any distinction between superiors from the East and the West. The recruit's answer would definitely not have been possible before October 1990. He said: "The only distinction I make is whether my superior is a decent guy or not!" The situation is steadily improving. Soldiers attending their basic training in the West appreciate the solidarity with their comrades. I am convinced that a maximum of contacts between these young people, joint training activities and a sound mixture of superiors East and West are a good way to contribute to a growing together at this lowest level.

The Non-Commissioned Officers.

An NCO corps like that of the *Bundeswehr* never existed in the EGA. Many functions which in the *Bundeswehr* are being handled by NCOs were the responsibility of officers in the EGA. There were three categories:

- NCOs who enlisted for a term of 3 years which was reduced to 2 years in 1989;
- career NCOs whose term of enlistment was at least 10 years and whose ranks ranged from sergeant to master sergeant;
- officer cadets who enlisted for at least 15 years holding the ranks of cadet up to staff senior cadet.

NCOs with limited terms of enlistment were normally not given superior functions. Superiors coming from the *Bundeswehr* were first required to learn that it was not simply possible to employ an NCO in functions such as squad leader or sergeant of the guard. Most of them were inclined to see themselves more or less as junior enlistees. They had joined the armed forces because they had been counting on advantages and privileges when it came to making a career choice or getting a college education. Conversations with them were quite depressing at the beginning. I hardly met one with any motivation other than that of career opportunities or one who had any merit which would make him a soldier. Also, I hardly met any soldier at the beginning who was willing to accept adequate training and then stay in the *Bundeswehr*. Many of them just had unpleasant memories. They also were suffering from the harassment to which they were subjected under the so-called "EX system," at least during the initial months. They reported that senior officers were difficult to get in touch with. Some had experienced unpleasant consequences when they complained to their company commanders. All of them conceded that relations between superiors and subordinates had fundamentally changed since October 3, 1990. "Now we can even go right up to the commander and talk to him," one astonished young NCO told me.

Unpopular as superiors were the so-called *Komplektekinder*. The word *Komplekte* in the EGA meant combat rations, and so they used that word for the sons of officers who gave the impression that they were being given undue favors and protection by their high-ranking fathers. "Whenever there were problems at work, they would go crying to daddy. And if daddy was working in a superior agency, there might be consequences," I was told.

The NCOs told me that up to the rank of sergeant-major one world almost exclusively be addressed in the familiar form of *Du*. They were bothered by the fact that now they were normally being addressed in the formal way using *Sie*. They felt uncomfortable concerning the hierarchical system among NCOs and they still do. They are not afraid of returning to civilian life. Many of them are willing to look around for new orientations. Some have received job offers from the West. Others are happy to be able to study the subject of their choice without any problems. Here, too, the scene changed after just a few months. Quite a few NCOs realized that the *Bundeswehr* was able to offer a good training program. After some time spent in the West and after working hand in hand with Western NCOs both during training and in duty functions they became more willing to at least give some good thought to what the *Bundeswehr* had to offer. Some began to enjoy their functions as superiors. Finally, a relatively great number decided to stay in the armed forces after all and to take advantage of career opportunities in the *Bundeswehr*. Not all of them appreciated their experience with Western superiors. Some felt they were being treated as second-class soldiers. They accept being told they need to learn more, but they are right in resenting suggestions that they are no good at anything.

The main problem of career NCOs is to recognize their new responsibilities and functions and to become proficient in them. While they did have their own areas of responsibility, they were normally used to working less independently and without being given any substantial authority in handling things on their own initiative. In various duty positions it was possible to be promoted up to sergeant-major without any increase in authority and competence. Now that those soldiers were

expected to act on their own, many problems were encountered at first. It was quite common for a sergeant of the guard holding a senior NCO rank to neither feel responsible for the discipline of a guard soldier nor to realize that it was his responsibility to straighten out inadequate performance of duty or at least report that fact; he was unlikely to attend to the welfare of soldiers by seeing to it that they would get enough sleep or that they were given adequate meals. Not only would he take no action himself, he would not even inform his superior. It was no exception to see someone having been assigned a staff duty function just sit there waiting for instructions without realizing that his job required him to make a decision on his own.

There were also positive examples of some who enjoyed their new responsibilities and who took only a short time to learn how to do a good job, putting a great deal of dedication into the effort. Uncertainties experienced by that category of persons waiting for personnel management decisions were of a lesser degree than was the case for officers. Word got around quickly that *just about everybody had the chance* to be taken over by the *Bundeswehr*, at least for 2 years. This had a reassuring effect.

NCOs from the West and from the East were relatively quick in becoming good buddies. They found common ground on the platform of their joint mission. Yet, there is still a long way to go, especially as far as leadership is concerned. It will be sometime before everybody learns not to look for organized action from higher up when it comes to what we call comradeship nor can there be any such organized action related to welfare concerns. The objective must be to develop a totally new relationship based on human equality.

Officer cadets in the EGA were assigned to technical specialty functions and were remarkably well trained as far as that particular specialty was concerned. From the very beginning they confronted me with what I felt to be a justified self-assurance and self-confidence based on the conviction that they were able to tackle a difficult job and were used to taking action on their own. Their problems in readjusting were the smallest. Having been taken over as senior NCOs with the

rank of sergeant first class (SFC) or master sergeant, they were generally confident in their ability to learn what was necessary so as to be able to handle even new and unfamiliar responsibilities efficiently. Most of them will file an application for integration in the *Bundeswehr*. One factor working in their favor was that in performing their assigned job specialties, they no longer had any responsibility for political work. Consequently, it is easier to get over the past; at least that is what it seems like.

Officers.

My predecessor, the last commander of the former 9th Tank Division, did his best to hand over his division in a good manageable condition. A short ceremony was staged on October 4, 1990 during which he was relieved of his command; he remained in the *Bundeswehr*.

Despite a great number of discharges prior to October 3, 1990, we were confronted with far too many officers. A division headquarters of the EGA with about 10,000 soldiers under its command had available more officers than a Corps HQ of the *Bundeswehr* which is in command of about 70,000 soldiers.

A particularly important category – distinctly set apart from everybody else – was the political officer. Having been given a wide range of responsibilities and far-reaching authority the political officers were subordinate to commanders in a more or less theoretical way only. One of the contradictory features in the midst of all this change and turmoil was the way in which these persons were treated. By order of the GDR Minister for Disarmament and Defense this career category was dissolved. A civic education branch was newly established. Some of the previous political officers were then assigned to that branch but also a number of field unit officers were transferred into that branch. Other long-standing political officers were reassigned to field units. Shortly before unification a directive was issued stating that the civic education branch was deactivated, and personnel holding respective positions were to be discharged. This resulted in the fact that some officers only recently assigned to the civic education branch and, more

often than not, acting in good faith, found themselves being discharged while others, who had been exclusively employed as political officers for many years and then managed in time to slip into field unit positions, were allowed to keep their jobs, at least for the time being. Normally, of course, those officers could not expect to be offered a 2-year term in the *Bundeswehr*. Those absurdities, which were none of our fault, did make us lose some credibility at the beginning.

All officers holding command positions had been under the obligation to cooperate with the State Security Service. Questions to that effect which were included in questionnaires resulted in confusion and concern. We learned something about the personnel structure of what used to be known as "Administration 2000" which had its own agencies within the armed forces down to regimental level. It had a large network of information reaching all the way into the companies. These agencies were the ones who would take care of security violations and negligence in the performance of duty, but also handled visits by relatives and Western contacts. The staff of these agencies were to be discharged. And that is what happened. Due to a gap left open in the procedural instructions it was not prohibited to reenlist them with a lower rank. This resulted in the fact that former officers of the State Security Service were holding low-profile positions as NCOs within the 9th Armored Division. After one of them had compromised himself, we tracked those people down and discharged them in accordance with the provisions of the unification treaty.

When processing applications for integration I came into direct contact with informers of the State Security Ministry. In some cases it became obvious how people had been trapped by the system. It was hard to tell who was the offender and who was the victim. After a case of misconduct in college, one officer had been subjected to blackmail. They had given him the choice of either cooperating or giving up college. Using a mixture of promises and threats, the members of the State Security Ministry found their informers who, in many cases, did not even realize they were doing anything wrong, having been led to believe they were making a contribution for a "clean" army.

The authority of commanders was often restricted. Many staff officers responsible for special functions gave orders and directives which were transmitted directly to subordinate commands. A company commander was told in detail by the battalion how to do his job, and even the battalion commander had little freedom of decision, at any event less than a company commander in the *Bundeswehr*.

Many jobs which in the *Bundeswehr* are carried out by NCOs were assigned to officers in the EGA. So, for instance, it was an officer's job to run a kitchen or a clothing issue point. It was rare for an individual to take the initiative. Most of the time, such initiatives were not even desired. Therefore, a great number of problems were encountered in the initial phase, and many of them still exist.

The subject dominating conversations and discussions during the first six months was the question of what one's personal future would be like. Everyone had to answer the question whether he wanted to leave the services by December 31, 1990 using the EGA retirement policy or whether he should try to stay on in the *Bundeswehr*. The promise that everyone would be given a fair chance was not believed at first. A dismantling slice by slice was expected and then, once the equipment and ammunition had been evacuated, a discharge following the principle which says "Never expect gratitude once you have served your purpose." A maximum of lethargy was noted everywhere. There were only a few who would take the initiative with self-confidence, either by studying manuals and seeking dialogue or by launching a consistent job hunt in the civilian sector. Only sluggishly did the first requests come in for acceptance as soldier with a limited term of enlistment. A great number of senior officers decided to get out. This step was made easier for many of them because cooperation between the Division and the Labor Exchange succeeded in getting most of them enrolled in qualification improvement programs. Clumsy handling of personnel management plus new rumors coming in all the time resulted in worsening the feeling of uncertainty. A manning plan for the Home Defense Brigade was being circulated, and many were vainly trying to make out their own

positions on that plan. We kept trying to do something about this gloomy mood and disperse rumors by engaging in numerous conversations both with individuals and in larger groups and by giving assistance in the processing of applications.

It was not until the end of the year that the picture started to change. The first favorable decisions on acceptance of reenlistments tended to build reassurance. Even more reassuring was the fact that, visibly and from the very beginning, some senior officers were also accepted for 2-year reenlistment terms. In the end, the promise of a fair chance had been kept after all. Nearly 75 percent of the applicants were accepted for reenlistment. Others are having their service extended until late 1991. This gives them almost one year to look for possibilities to qualify themselves or to try and find a job. During the first quarter of 1991, one could feel how the mood was changing, a trend which continues to have a visibly favorable impact on the performance of duty as well. Conversations with officers from the West today reveal to an increasing extent their willingness to contribute to the process of rebuilding and integration.

I am being told not to draw conclusions as to the quality of the former EGA based on what I experienced during the first months. I can sense an underlying pride in past achievements, successful exercises and the high state of operational readiness. I can often feel something like shame over the desolate picture which a broken army presented in October 1990. Certain small demonstrations are intended to show me that a sense of achievement and professionalism still exists, even if those features may be somewhat concealed under the surface. I think it is worthwhile to remobilize those attitudes and I feel this belief being confirmed by improvements in the performance of duty in recent weeks.

Within just a few months, many officers had their ranks reduced by one or two steps. To accept this was not easy for them. One battalion commander with the rank of major was reenlisted in the technical specialist category giving him the rank of first lieutenant. One lieutenant colonel and regimental commander had to decide whether he would continue to serve

as a captain. Generally, however, they were relieved with the opportunity to remain in the *Bundeswehr*. We were trying to explain as best we could the reasons for the grade reductions as a necessary measure of adapting to average promotion times in the West. Even if this made sense in logical thinking, some degree of disappointment remained. This was somewhat softened as many became aware that they were nevertheless being given greater responsibility. This is especially true for those soldiers who – by becoming platoon leaders or company commanders – are directly employed in leading soldiers.

There were many who had problems realizing the full extent of their responsibility and living up to it. Adding to this were uncertainties due to inadequate knowledge of military legislation, gaps which even professional development measures cannot overcome so quickly. Consequently, there was a trend to look the other way when violations of discipline occurred, rather than take consistent action. On the occasion of a leadership seminar conducted in November 1990, I had a discussion with officers of our armored reconnaissance battalion concerning modern leadership. The attendees were trying to make me believe that the principles of "Innere Führung" (Leadership and Civic Education) were applied in a wider sense in the EGA as well. I, for my part, tried to convince them of the need to change attitudes and conduct by pointing out the context of welfare measures, poor quarters, acceptance of the "EK system" and also by using the "citizen in uniform" conception. Some officers felt their honor was being questioned.

The first significant steps of progress were becoming evident during a conference of company commanders. For two days we discussed modern leadership based on a wide range of practical examples taken from normal, everyday duty operations within a company. A group of recruits told me of their widely differing experiences during the first days. Those young soldiers were not beating around the bush, and we had a lively discussion among equals with the company commanders. Day and night were too short for answering all the questions that came up. But I went home feeling that some

of what had been discussed had been understood, and I had the impression of having experienced intensive comradeship.

Setbacks were bound to occur. In one unit there were incidents suggesting a resurgence of the "EK system." But vigorous action was taken. In one basic training company, all the instructors and supervisors were gone after 1900 hours. That first evening, the young recruits were left to themselves, but in another company, everybody got together for a good talk, and the higher-ranking soldiers were making successful efforts to overcome uneasiness and embarrassment.

Close friendships are developing. Officers who had been sent to the West for training, or who are being guided by Western officers in their new functions, visit each other along with their families. After just a short time, I decided not to have any more discussions or briefing sessions attended exclusively by Western officers. On repeated occasions we get together in my home to have conversations on a variety of subjects, with visitors including both officers from the East and from the West. Relations are becoming more open and relaxed. Success at work helps to build self-confidence. Laughing faces are replacing grim expressions. Social nights work out fine. Currently, social gatherings including family members are being organized. We are getting together more and more frequently, not only under the pressure of the joint mission to be accomplished under difficult conditions, but also through personal encounters. Confidence is growing.

During the Gulf crisis we had to answer some tough questions, which was understandable. A deep impression was left by televised interviews with *Bundeswehr* soldiers who, in the light of the crisis and the necessary demonstration of solidarity within the Alliance, were refusing to serve in Turkey or were complaining in crybaby fashion about hardships. This impression may be summed up like this: In the West, too, not everything should be accepted for face value, in other words "all that glitters it not gold."

It was difficult to explain that – on the one hand – an army must not yield to all demands, while – on the other – it must be loyally obedient and ready to accomplish its mission as desired

by its democratic government and in accordance with constitutional principles. I also felt bothered by what was happening in some *Bundeswehr* units against the background of the Gulf War, which I frankly admitted.

At first, it was the lack of personal self-confidence, but also the requirement of having so much to do in such a short time that prevented discussions about the past. During that period one could hear many simplistic justifications suggesting something like "we also made our contribution to peace from the place where we were standing." The attempt to justify oneself was an attempt to put both armies on equal footing. Discussions were then becoming more intense. It became obvious that even in the EGA the process of change had not started on October 3, 1990 but, at the latest, at the time when the Berlin Wall was beginning to be opened. There was a feeling of having been cheated by former leaders. This feeling was confirmed once people coming to the West could see for themselves that in reality the *Bundeswehr* was far from preparing for an attack.

Quite a few officers found it hard to believe that in the *Bundeswehr* more than 90 percent of military personnel were spending their Christmas holidays with their families, while in the EGA 85 percent of its personnel were waiting for an attack by NATO, ready to move out of their barracks compounds within a few minutes. People could watch how the democratic process works in the Bonn Parliament and in the regional state parliament in Kiel and were gradually adapting to democratic rules. However, when the time came for parliamentary elections, nearly 50 percent of the votes from military dependent housing areas went to the PDS (the successor of the former communist party, SED).

Once you took a closer look, however, you could see that the voters' turnout was only about 50 percent. This proved to me that a process of "rethinking" had set in which initially expressed itself in voters' abstention. This change of thinking also became obvious during discussions. Today, however, people no longer seek to dodge discussions about the past. Many conversations we have at my home are about the past. Many questions are asked, and explanations are given for

one's own behavior. Considering that most soldiers were cut off from sources of information and were living in a system where one political party was trying to control life from the cradle to the grave, I tend to believe them when they tell me they were honestly convinced that they were serving a good cause. Nearly all of them realize that socialism as an ideology has outlived its day. Their conception of the world on which they built their careers has collapsed, with the ruins scattered all over the place.

I have met only a few "turncoats." Many are trying to reorganize their conception of the world. My feeling is that thanks to new information, new liberties and new partners for conversation this reorientation is not only possible, but that it has already begun. As far as this goes, however, we need to think in long-term perspective. But then, we have time, too. The job of the soldiers from the West is to support this whole process through dialogue and to try and keep this dialogue going with persistence and patience. As we do so, we realize that we too are exposing ourselves to a process of change. Our conception of a homogeneous party-related army begins to waver, at least as far as the people in that army are concerned. What we find is people, nice people and others who are less pleasant, some who are straightforward and others who are reserved, some efficient and some less efficient. Trying to understand we ask ourselves where we would stand if we had grown up under that other system. This, of course, must not make us lose an evenhanded perspective.

I hope we will be successful in telling the difference between those who are honestly ready for a reorientation, regardless of whether that process may take years, and those only interested in turning their coats in order to gain social security. For my part, I am convinced that we may count on a great number of officers to be willing and able, at long last, to work hand-in-hand with us in building our German armed forces of the future, in which it will no longer make any difference where someone has grown up.

Background Environment.

October 3, 1990 was a day on which the first freely elected city delegates, mayors and county or district administrators had been in office for a short time. State governments were not constituted until some time later. Administration agencies were operational to a limited extent only. The new laws were largely unknown. A lot of things were not working yet. At Labor Exchange or employment offices long waiting lines were the rule. Unemployment was particularly high here, and still continues to be. A few major industrial enterprises with a great number of employees are on the verge of bankruptcy. The deep and negative marks left by 40 years of state-controlled economy are particularly obvious when we look at the condition of smaller companies, the environment, the roads and other lines of communication, construction projects, housing and infrastructure as a whole. The financial situation of towns and villages was initially poor. It started to improve only when the new program, aimed at boosting the Eastern economy, got underway.

The decision taken by the Federal Ministry of Defense to have a large *Bundeswehr* force stationed in this area in the future had a reassuring effect. Interest in the new *Bundeswehr* was great from the very beginning. Efforts to establish relations with the population were well received. On October 4, 1990 already, which marked the change of command, almost all of the mayors of our garrison towns were present. It did not take long before we found ourselves in the role of advisors much in demand with many of us trying to help whenever this was consistent with our military duty. We were asked to give our opinion on the development of prices, on the school system, on youth affairs, and on the establishment of new clubs and associations. We gave them permission to enter numerous previously restricted military areas. We invited citizens to attend information sessions on career qualification or information lectures given by commercial companies. We provided mayors with maps, which had been kept secret before, portraying their town and real estates. We tried to provide practical help regarding environmental protection, prevention of fires and disaster control. Such efforts are

appreciated. The *Bundeswehr* is getting to be a neighbor to be trusted and counted on. Adding to this is a good share of curiosity. Several thousand residents of Uckermunde were guests watching a solemn oath-taking ceremony held in the stadium. Citizens with problems can go directly to local commanders. Our invitation for a round of conversation with soldiers was responded to by nearly 400 pupils and students. Some wanted help, feeling they suffered unfair treatment from the EGA. Small-time contractors come to us asking for contract jobs. One construction project scheduled for 1991 amounting to 50 million DM was almost completely contracted out to local firms to the great benefit of the latter.

But there is also another side to the story. Nasty experiences with the EGA have been transferred on to the *Bundeswehr*. Rumors were spread that the hunting reserve of former Defense Minister Hoffmann, which had been closed to the general public, was now being reserved for the officers of the new *Bundeswehr*. None of that is true, and I can only hope that our press release, which points out that this area has been turned over to the Federal Forestry Administration, will be believed.

A negative factor impeding the process of growing together also to be seen in the different material conditions for Eastern and Western soldiers. Soldiers from the West are entitled to their full salary plus a high tax-free bonus if they perform their service in the new Eastern states, while soldiers coming from the EGA continue to be paid a little more than their previous salaries. What little extra they receive, however, is swallowed up by increased costs. It was not until the introduction of the new Federal Pay System – from July 1, 1991 on – that they now at least receive 60 percent of Western salaries. Here it is necessary to explain that adaptation of salaries in public service cannot be quicker than in the economy in general. But it still bothers people to see that different salaries are paid for the same work. All political efforts should therefore be concentrated on keeping the necessary transition period as short as possible.

It goes without saying that an extremely high priority is currently being attached to public relations and public affairs

work. Rather than hide behind the walls of barracks we try, wherever possible, to get the civil population included in our activities. I gave permission for temporary use of a road which runs across our military training area. This is something people appreciate. The way we are trying to be frank and honest is being noted with surprise and satisfaction. Winning confidence is a task that is collateral to everything else we do toward our principal mission. Despite initial successes we must realize that we still have a long way to go.

We also try to give consideration to the churches. Having been hostile to the party (SED), the state and the army now have to readjust their "enemy" conception. Parsons are not used to seeing soldiers attending mass and prayer meetings. The synod of the Protestant Church Association has referred to the service of so-called "construction soldiers" – those refusing service in arms – as a clear signal for commitment to peace. This is the attitude many continue to hang on to. Nevertheless, we see great willingness to engage in human encounters and dialogue. Besides being invited to sessions of the district synod I also attended the day of youth activities organized by the Western Pomerania church at Greifswald. We had a chance to witness the prayer meeting held in memory of the first anniversary of the large-scale demonstration staged at Uckermunde.

A meeting organized as part of the Protestant church rally gave me an opportunity – at the request of the Church of Western Pomerania – to discuss with three clergymen, on stage, questions related to military chaplaincy. The Superintendent of the Uckermunde church circle extended several invitations for a round of talks with soldiers in which officers previously belonging to the EGA took a great interest. Such sessions are being continued. The first worship services for soldiers are taking place with a high turnout. This clearly indicates that it is possible, even under the aspect of differing basic positions, to come together on a human scale, provided that the seriousness of each side's decision is being accepted. We need discussion and dialogue between soldiers and clergymen, particularly so when this involves such soldiers who take a somewhat remote stand toward the church and

who have quite deliberately been kept away from it. It would be regrettable if the process of searching for a new attitude toward the state and society within the military establishment were to exclude the participation of the church. Far more is at stake than just the spiritual and religious assistance for the few soldiers attracted to church activities and thus desiring religious assistance.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned.

- Dialogue is what we need. We need it within the *Bundeswehr*. We need it with the outside. We need it with the churches. We need to go ahead with efforts in that direction.
- We must not back out when it comes to dealing with the past. We need to come to terms with it, and we have to do this together.
- We must count on a process of "rethinking" for which we need time. Everyone emerging from that process will be a different person than when he got into it. We are no exception.
- The road leading to a new conception of the world is possible, but it takes time. And time is what we have.
- We need to maintain a good spirit of comradeship with the respective categories of rank and hierarchy, just as we need to do so across those categories.
- Every soldier having been assigned here from the West should have the feeling when he leaves after two or three years, that he is leaving behind good buddies and friends.
- Not every soldier with professional efficiency is the right man for the task he faces here. In addition to an unwavering strength to assert oneself, preconditions for being successful here include human qualities, willingness to dialogue and also to

assume responsibilities and give advice to the civilian sector.

- A smoothly running system of perfect bureaucracy does not get us anywhere. We need soldiers willing to take action where the picture is vague and blurred. We need higher headquarters which understand and support this.
- We must not denounce the former EGA's proficiency where this has proved to be a fact. We have to build on it.
- Professional skills plus the willingness to achieve good results should be seen as a positive heritage which the former EGA may contribute to the German armed forces.
- We need to count on frank and honest information and provide opportunities to personally experience the democratic process in Bonn and elsewhere.
- We must help to get a new understanding of leadership both into the heads and the hearts.
- We must learn to think in long-term perspective.

Persistence and steadiness are what counts. We have to ensure thorough training. If we expect the same achievements, we will have to offer the same training.

- Reassignments from the West to the East must not be a one-way street. We must achieve an "exchange of blood" as quickly as possible from the West to the East and vice versa. This is the only way to avoid establishing two different armies within the Bundeswehr.
- We must help soldiers find jobs, especially those about to be discharged now and those who will be discharged two years from now. The term "social constitutional state" would sound stale if we were to dodge that responsibility.

- We must stop talking and thinking in terms of "Westerners" and "Easterners." It should no longer matter in the future where someone has grown up. The only thing that counts is the mission, the achievement, the dedication and the person's character. We have started to go down the road toward joint German Armed Forces. It is the experience of all of us that this goal can only be reached together. But also, confidence has grown that the problem can and will be solved.
- More and greater efforts will be demanded from everyone for a long time to come, but the objective is worth it.
- Not all the good comes from the West. If together we join efforts in building the new armed forces there may be a chance to correct weaknesses, such as laziness, peevish complaining and red tape.
- *In overcoming the gap we are about to contribute our own share in shaping a portion of unity. This should not be understood primarily in the sense of organization, but it implies unity in terms of action, understanding and trust.*